

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE - SPOTLIGHT SPECIES ACTION PLAN

Common Name: Yellow-billed loon

Scientific Name: *Gavia adamsii*

Lead Region: 7

Lead Field Office: Fairbanks Fish and Wildlife Field Office

Species Information:

Status: Candidate

Recovery Priority Number or Listing Priority Number: LPN 8

Recovery Plan or Candidate Assessment Form: Candidate Assessment Form, approved October 2009 (available at http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/candforms_pdf/r7/B0DQ_V01.pdf)

Most Recent 5-year Review: Not applicable

Other: 12-month finding published in Federal Register 25 March 2009

Threats: Although exact harvest numbers are uncertain, illegal harvest in the Bering Strait Region of Alaska and Russia may be at levels high enough to cause declines in an otherwise stable population. Additional potential threats include bycatch from commercial and subsistence fishing; contaminants and effects of pollution on prey availability in wintering grounds; onshore and offshore oil and gas development; and effects of climate change on breeding habitats.

Target: Identify and reduce the magnitude of threats. The species was found to be warranted for listing because of harvest, as well as concern about other potential but poorly understood threats. Information on harvest levels and the importance of other threats is of poor quality, and must be improved. Once we have better information, we can work to reduce all threats. For example, if harvest declines significantly, if the population trend measured on the Arctic Coastal Plain is stable or increases, and if trends in the rest of the breeding range can be established and found to be stable or increasing, it might not be necessary to propose the species for listing.

Measure: Lower LPN (decrease magnitude or imminence of threat)

Actions: Improving the currently questionable information about actual levels of harvest, and eliminating harvest are high priority actions for this species. However, other potential threats are also poorly understood, and need further study so that actual threats to the species can be better evaluated and addressed. In addition, further information is needed about the size, distribution and migration routes of yellow-billed loons.

Actions addressing harvest and oil and gas development in Alaska were outlined in the *Conservation Agreement for the Yellow-billed Loon*, signed in 2006 by representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. National Park Service, State of Alaska Departments of Fish and Game and Natural Resources, and the North Slope Borough. Actions addressing harvest include improving harvest survey methods and implementation, conducting studies to analyze cultural use of yellow-billed loons and migration

pathways, and providing education to eliminate harvest. Actions addressing oil and gas development include developing and implementing “stipulations and required operating procedures” benefiting yellow-billed loons to be followed by oil and gas leasees on Federal and State lands in Alaska, continued monitoring of populations, and conducting further research to understand effects of disturbance and breeding-lake water withdrawals. Additional actions to address these and other potential threats were discussed during two multi-organization workshops held in April and May 2009. These actions include conducting basic research on ecology, distribution and population trends of the species throughout its range. Actions were not prioritized, and responsibility for actions beyond those described in the *Conservation Agreement* was not assigned.

Identify responsible parties for the actions: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which recently found the species warranted for listing, is responsible for regulating and enforcing subsistence harvest of migratory birds in Alaska. The Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council, which includes a representative from the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game and regional representatives of hunters, also plays a role in educating hunters and gathering harvest information. Other responsible parties include land management and regulatory agencies (for example, those listed above for the *Conservation Agreement*), as well as Alaska Native organizations such as Kawerak, Inc., which conducts harvest surveys in the Bering Strait Region, and partners in the oil and gas industry who lease Federal and State lands and waters for resource development. All these parties are working together to improve information about threats and to ameliorate them, but, as noted above, do not have assigned responsibility for actions beyond those described in the *Conservation Agreement*. Biologists from several agencies, supported by academic and industry grants, are currently conducting studies on yellow-billed loon populations and migration patterns. Parties responsible for addressing threats in other countries within the range of the yellow-billed loon have yet to be identified.

Estimated costs of the actions: Harvest survey improvements throughout the breeding and migration range of the species in Alaska alone would cost approximately \$50,000 to \$100,000 per year, with a similar amount needed to evaluate harvest and determine population trends and migration routes in Russia. Additional educational efforts cost approximately \$50,000. Implementation of regulations in areas of oil and gas development will not incur specific costs. Additional research costs are large, but could be funded in discrete parts as opportunities arise.

Role of other agencies: The role of other agencies varies, as described in the *Conservation Agreement*, and above under **Actions**.

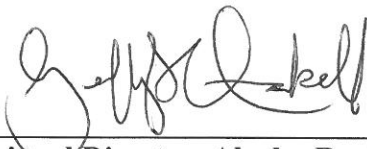
Role of other ESA programs: Section 6 grants will be available for this species, and we will work with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to develop project proposals for this species.

Role of other FWS programs: Migratory Birds and State Programs, which includes both the Division of Migratory Bird Management (MBM) and the staff of the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council (AMBCC), will continue to play important roles. The MBM conducts waterfowl surveys used to estimate population trends of the yellow-billed loon and AMBCC recommends subsistence harvest regulations to the Service. Both these offices conduct education about harvest regulations. Law Enforcement may also play a role in reducing harvest. Yellow-billed loons do not breed within National Wildlife Refuges, but occur within 20 miles of most of the coast of Alaska, and so are found in waters around the Alaska Maritime National

Wildlife Refuge, Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, and the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge.

Additional funding analysis: The actions described above will require new funding from a wide variety of sources. We will pursue research, monitoring and actions to eliminate harvest with any additional funding that becomes available.

Approved: _____


Regional Director, Alaska Region
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Date: _____

11/23/05